



2005 Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

Customer Focus

It was a beautiful fall day in September of this year when partners came together to celebrate the purchasing of development rights to the Escobar's Highland Farm. The 75-acre parcel was purchased for a total of \$3 million. The partners involved were the: USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, which was the largest contributor (\$1.3 million), Aquidneck Land Trust, Town of Portsmouth Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, with the support of the Department of Environmental Management, and The Nature Conservancy with funding through the Champlin Foundation. With the purchase of the farmland Rhode Islanders will be assured that, the farm will be preserved forever. The Aquidneck Land Trust holds the title.

The Escobar family has been farming the lush, fertile farmland in the densely populated Town of Portsmouth, for the past sixty years. Developers have been knocking on their door for many years trying to get him to sell the farm so that the developers could build approximately 80 housing units. Escobar would have greater economic gains had he sold to the developers, but refused to see the family's land turn into residential housing. Escobar said, "It would have insulted the memory of my parents." "It wasn't about the money," said Escobar, "but what was in my heart."

The Escobar's continues to farm. They raise about 65 dairy cows and around 55 heifers. The milk from the cows goes to the local cooperative, which the farm is a member along with four other farms. The cooperative produces and markets Rhody Fresh Milk and other dairy products locally. Christmas trees, pumpkins, and other vegetables are sold at the farm, too. Every year thousands of children visit the farm to tackle the 10-acre corn maze.

Rhode Island Summary

Overview

In Rhode Island, the NRCS staff reached out to as many potential applicants as possible to alert them to the availability of these funds. Farmland is being protected from urbanization in Rhode Island by a diverse group of entities, ranging from the State of Rhode Island's long established Agricultural Land Preservation Commission to several relatively new non-profit land trusts. The USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) help farmers keep their productive land in agriculture. The FRPP provides financial assistance for State, Tribal, and local governments and non-profit organizations to purchase conservation easements (or development rights) on farmland. Under the FRPP, NRCS works with a cooperating entity to provide up to 50% of the price paid for the conservation easement. The entity holds, manages, and enforces the easement. The FRPP was established in 1996, attracting applications for funding from numerous entities in Rhode Island and throughout the nation.

Accomplishments

NRCS received applications from six entities seeking funds from the 2005 FRPP to assist them with the protection of 14 farms. The farms represent a cross section of Rhode Island agriculture and the dreams of the land's owners to preserve both productive farmland and part of Rhode Island's rural heritage. The farms ranged in size from 12 acres to 96 acres. The landowners range from retired persons seeking to preserve the heritage of their land, to younger farmers actively managing the farm on a daily basis. Many types of farms were represented – fruit, vegetables, dairy, livestock, and hay. Rhode Island received \$3,391,069 in FY 2005 funds to distribute among the applicants. By June 1, the applicants were ranked according to an established FRPP scoring system. Funds were allocated to three applicants. The three entities will continue their negotiations with the eight farms selected for funding.

Outlook

Interest in protecting farmland from urbanization remains very strong in Rhode Island. Public support for funding farmland protection and other open space initiatives has been unwavering for the past twenty years. Past efforts by State, local government and private organizations have yielded many heartening successes, but the job is far from over. As farmland owners' age and family situations evolve, the need to receive cash value for farmland matures. It is anticipated that the Rhode Island Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, local governments, and land trusts will continue to actively preserve farmland over the next decade. To date, the number of willing sellers has outpaced the available funds to protect farmlands.

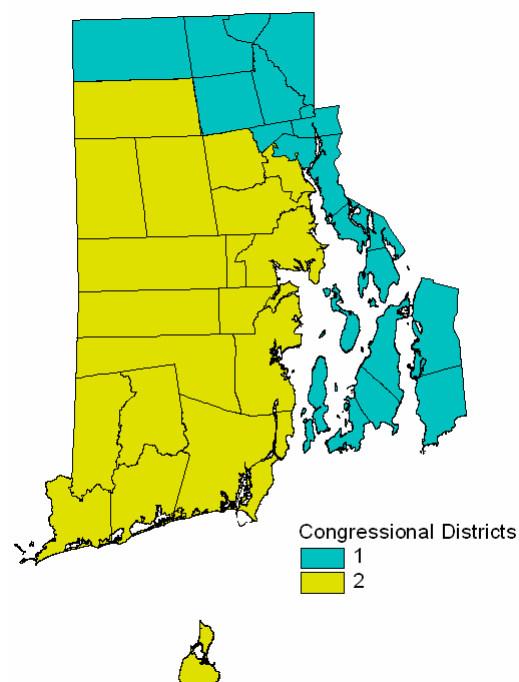
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Louie Escobar, at the Rhody Fresh Kick-off

Rhode Island's FRPP Dollars and Contracts by Congressional District



Rhode Island's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program Activities

Fiscal Year 2005			Cumulative Total (1996 – 2005)	
Congressional Districts	FRPP Dollars	Number of New Farms to be preserved	FRPP Dollars	Number of farms projected to be preserved
District 1	\$2,541,069	3	\$5,820,054	15
District 2	\$850,000,	1	\$4,440,100	17
State Totals	\$3,391,069	*4	\$10,260,154	32

*Eight farms were selected for funding in 2005, but four of the eight farms were previously selected in prior years. Funding was added to prior year funds due to unanticipated high acquisition costs.

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